All Saints' Church
Bow Brickhill

The parish church of All Saints, Bow Brickhill, is remarkable for the conspicuous position in which it stands. It may be seen for many miles around like a castle on a wooded hill. It was often spoken of as the 'beacon church' and a beacon did exist about a quarter of a mile south of the church. From the tower, a far-flung view of Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire and neighbouring counties is obtained. During the Napoleonic wars, the tower was used as a telegraph station and during the 1939-1945 war, the tower was used by the Royal Observer Corps.

The church is built of sandstone rubble, in large blocks, dug from the Greensand escarpment on which it stands. Before the fifteenth century the church probably consisted of an aisleless nave and a chancel dating from the twelfth century. The first records of the church refer to a transfer of the advowson in 1185.

The north and south aisles and the west tower were added in the fifteenth century, when the arcades were added and the nave lengthened. The chancel was probably built at the same time. In 1630 the nave was re-roofed, but afterwards, through neglect, became sadly dilapidated and the church is said to have been disused for nearly 150 years. It was restored in 1756-1757 by Browne Willis, a noted local antiquarian. The east wall of the chancel was rebuilt in brick at this time. The church was restored again in 1883 when the south porch was added.

On the north side of the chancel is a mural tablet of black marble inscribed:

"Here lieth William Watson, borne in Buckland in Hertfordshire, of Yeoman race. He was a bachelor of Artes. He continued Parson of this Church full thirty and six yeares. He lived a single life, cleared of all criminal offences. He was liberall to the needfull, verie bountifull to his kindred: a zealous worshipper of God: an Enemy to Schismes, Sectes and Heresies: a Lover of Equitie and Hater of Discord: beloved of all (of me especially). He died in the entrance of the threescore and fourth years of his age, the last day of November 1608, in the sixth yeare of the happy Raigne of Kinge James over England, being fully assured by the Power of Christ to rise againe, and to live with Hevenly Saints eternally.

"Thou art to me, O Death, a Gaine, by dying I am blest
Because that in ye Lord I die, thou art, O Death my rest.
Borne I was of mortalle seede to die: I die to rise againe;
The second life is eve'life, wch feeles no death nor payne.
Erected by John Utton, Executore."

A long-standing choral tradition exists at All Saints'. In 1847 Thomas Webster painted his famous picture, "A Village Choir". The setting of this picture was the church and the characters were drawn from amongst Bow Brickhill villagers. The original picture now hangs in the Victoria & Albert Museum as part of the Sheepshanks Collection.

Bow Brickhill was the first parish church to affiliate to the School of English Church Music – now Royal School of Church Music. Its founder Sir Sydney Nicholson, organist and Master of the Choristers at Westminster Abbey, owned a house in the village and close links were forged between the Abbey's choristers and Bow Brickhill. Sir Sydney named a hymn tune after the village.

The churchyard. The light sandy soil enables unusual plants to grow. A botanical survey of Buckinghamshire churchyards (1983/5) showed ours to be one of the most interesting, with wild daffodil being one of the most beautiful species.

Further information about the church and village can be found at www.bowbrickhill.com

The chancel which measures 25 ft by 11 ft, was modern windows on the east and south walls. The fifteenth century chancel arch is of two orders: the chamfered outer order is continuous, the hollow chamfered inner order dies into the jambs. The stained glass in the east window is relatively modern.

The nave, 34 ft by 15 ft, has fifteenth century north and south arcades of three bays, the westernmost bay in each arcade being wider than the others: the two-centred arches are of two hollow chamfered orders: the pillars are octagonal with moulded corbels. The two-centred tower arch in the west wall is of three continuously chamfered orders, the innermost having moulded capitals.

The north aisle has a fifteenth century east window of two trefoiled lights in a two-centred head with a moulded external label. The other windows in this aisle are modern.

The south aisle has a fifteenth century window of three trefoiled lights under a four trefoiled head and it is filled with modern glass. In the south wall are three fifteenth century windows, each of two cinquefoiled lights under a square head, with an external label which has plain stops. The south doorway is modern.

The west tower is of two stages, with diagonal buttresses, a stair turret and an embattled parapet. In the west wall is an original window of three uncusped lights in a two-centred head with a deep external reveal. The bell-chamber is lighted by plain windows of the fifteenth century, each of two lights in a pointed head.

The south porch dates from the restoration of 1883. The porch itself was restored in 1907 when a fine carving in stone by N Hitch was inserted above the door. It depicted Christ and four Apostles but it has unfortunately been destroyed by vandals

The roof of the nave is low pitched and of plain chamfered beams, with king post trusses; one tie beam bears the date 1630.

The font dates from the fifteenth century. It has an octagonal bowl, with cusped circular and quatrefoil panels. In one panel is a shield with arms, two tau crosses or mallets. The bowl is supported by figures of angels with outstretched wings. The stem is octagonal with moulded base.

South of the chancel arch there is a niche with chamfered pointed head.

The pulpit is a fine specimen of fifteenth century workmanship. It is hexagonal with traceried panels, with cinquefoil crocketed heads. This pulpit was brought from the old parish church in Buckingham in 1777.

The piscina in the south east corner of the south aisle dates from the fifteenth century. It is a pointed piscina with a round bowl.

The tower contains four bells. The treble is inscribed "God Save Our King 1634" and is by James Keene of Woodstock. The second is by Anthony Chandler of Drayton Parslow, 1670. The third is of the sixteenth century and is inscribed "ABCD.QRS.DEFG.EG.W"- although some of the letters are upside down. The founder of this bell cannot be identified.

The tenor - weighing about 10 cwts in the approximate key of A flat - bears the inscription "Soli Deeo Gloria Pax Hominibus 1649" - (To God alone be glory and to men peace), and is by Henry Bagley of Chacomb. The framework is inscribed 1628 I.I. The bells and framework are in poor condition and cannot be rung.

The communion plate, (which is not kept in the church), includes a cup and paten of 1626, both inscribed 1627. The cup is inscribed "Bridget Hartawe of London, widow, being the daughter of Richard Parret borne in this Parish doth frely bestow this Cupp for the use of the Sacrament for ever. Anno Domini 1627." The paten is inscribed "Bow Brickhill in the Countie of Buckingham 1627".

The registers commence in 1653 and contain a record of the appointment of John Pitts, sworn as registrar under the Cromwell Act, signed by Henry Whitbread, Esq., one of the magistrates of the County of Buckingham. These registers have been transcribed by the Bletchley Archaeological and Historical Society.